

Laurel Ridge and the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Pennsylvania State Parks Mission

The primary purpose of Pennsylvania state parks is to provide opportunities for enjoying healthful outdoor recreation and serve as outdoor classrooms for environmental education. In meeting these purposes, the conservation of the natural, scenic, aesthetic, and historical values of parks should be given first consideration. Stewardship responsibilities should be carried out in a way that protects the natural outdoor experience for the enjoyment of current and future generations.



2022

LAUREL RIDGE STATE PARK



The 14,704-acre Laurel Ridge State Park stretches along Laurel Mountain from the picturesque Youghiogheny River at Ohiopyle, to the Conemaugh Gorge near Johnstown. This large park spans Cambria, Fayette, Somerset, and Westmoreland counties. The main feature of the park is the 70-mile Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail (LHHT), which provides the setting for semi-wilderness backpacking and day hiking.

The park has remarkable scenery. Spring wildflowers dot the forest floor in early April followed by a vibrant green forest as leaf-out begins in late April. Mountain laurel blooms in June, followed by rhododendron blooming in late June and early July. Autumn color peaks mid-October. Winter is spectacular when the park is covered in a deep blanket of snow and the occasional great horned owl calls through the moon-lit forest.

Reservations

Reservations for overnight stays are mandatory and can be made up to 11 months in advance. Reservations can be made online at www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks or by phone by calling 724-455-3744.

HISTORY

Approximately 250 million years ago, a collision between North America and North Africa created the Laurel Ridge and the rest of the Appalachian Mountains. Initially, the Appalachian Mountains stood taller than the Rocky Mountains but have been weathering away for the past 200 million years.

As daunting a task as it was to traverse the steep, rocky mountain terrain, Indigenous people, including the Monongahela, seldom had issue taking advantage of the vast resources Laurel Ridge had to offer. As nomadic people, the Monongahela used Laurel Ridge primarily for hunting and gathering, procuring what they needed for survival before journeying on.

As European settlers expanded westward, they were able to navigate the formidable mountain by using the many different footpaths carved out by Indigenous peoples. Navigation was important, particularly for troops marching through the untamed wilderness during the French and Indian War.

Laurel Ridge remained pristine for much of its history, the abundant natural resources quickly drew in pioneers and entrepreneurs by the hundreds at the start of the Industrial Revolution. The early 1800s saw the expansion of stone iron furnaces that sprang up along the flanks of the mountain. As transportation improved, logging and mining companies swept through the Laurel

Highlands, exploiting the rich mineral and timber resources. Much of Laurel Ridge was clear cut, and logs were hauled down the mountain by way of the Shay Locomotive. By 1940, the area had been plowed and plundered by industry and drought, leaving in its wake a desolate, barren landscape lacking the pristine natural resources that were once plentiful.

In 1966, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy acquired 11,230 acres along Laurel Ridge, ranging from the Youghiogheny River to the Conemaugh

River. As part of the Project 70 park movement, the land comprising Laurel Ridge State Park was purchased for the purposes of creating public lands and parks for conservation, recreation, and preservation. The land was conveyed to the commonwealth as a substantial part of Laurel Ridge State Park and the 70-mile Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail. The first portion of Laurel Ridge State Park and the LHHT were dedicated and opened officially on May 15, 1974. Decades later, we continue to enjoy all of the natural wonders this mountain has to offer.



Photo by Michael D. McCumber

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Spend the Day

HIKING: 70 MILES

See the **Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail** section below for hiking and backpacking information. Adjacent state parks and forests provide additional hiking opportunities.

PICNICKING: A picnic pavilion in the southern part of the park is available for rent at the Rt. 653 trailhead area. Restrooms and potable water are nearby. If unreserved, the pavilion is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Make online reservations at www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks or call toll-free 888-PA-PARKS (888-727-2757).



Photo by Linda Seaton

HUNTING AND FIREARMS: Almost all of Laurel Ridge State Park is open to hunting, trapping, and the training of dogs from the fall archery season until March 31 of the following year. Common game species are deer, turkey, bear, and grouse.

Hunting woodchucks, also known as groundhogs, is prohibited. Dog training is only permitted from the day following Labor Day through March 31 in designated hunting areas. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania Game Commission rules and regulations apply. Contact the park office for ADA accessible hunting information.

Use **extreme caution** with firearms at all times. Other visitors use the park during hunting seasons. Firearms and archery equipment used for hunting may be uncased and ready for use only in authorized hunting areas during hunting seasons. In areas not open to hunting or during non-hunting seasons, firearms and archery equipment shall be kept in the owner's vehicle or enclosed trailer. Exceptions include: law enforcement officers and individuals with a valid *Pennsylvania License to Carry Firearms* are authorized to carry a firearm concealed on their person while they are within a state park.

Enjoy the Winter

SNOWMOBILING: The 120-mile Laurel Highlands Snowmobile Trail System traverses state park and forest lands. Conditions permitting, the trail is open after the end of rifle deer season in December.

For more information, contact Forbes State Forest: 724-238-1200

Trail conditions: 877-766-6253

Snowmobiles are prohibited on the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail.



CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING: A cross-country ski concession, adjacent to the Rt. 653 parking lot, provides opportunities to traverse more than 20 miles of trails. The concession grooms surfaces for classic and freestyle skiing. Trail fee required.

The Pennsylvania Cross-country Skier's Association offers free ski lessons and a youth ski team. Their webcam shows the latest snow conditions. www.pacsa.org

SNOWSHOEING: Explore the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail in the winter with snowshoes. Rentals are available from the cross-country ski concession.



A WORD ON PENNSYLVANIA BLACK BEARS



Black bear

Laurel Ridge State Park has excellent habitat for black bears. Bears roam freely throughout the park and normally avoid people, but bears can become aggressive when people get between them and food. Never approach a bear, and be especially wary of mother bears with cubs.

Black bears have an excellent sense of smell, which makes up for poor eyesight and fair hearing. Aromatic scents coming from your food and toiletries can attract a curious and hungry bear from a great distance. Usually, bears use their claws to tear apart rotting logs to find food, but those claws also work well at opening food containers.

Keep your campsite clean. Clean up after meals, and store all food and scented items inside a locked vehicle when possible. When backpacking, store food away from your overnight campsite and by suspending the food between two trees, ten feet in the air and three feet from either tree.

If you encounter a black bear, do not run. Back away slowly without making direct eye contact. If the bear does not leave the area, make a loud noise like blowing a whistle, honking a car horn, or hanging a pot. Notify a park employee if you have difficulties with bears. Call 911 if it is an emergency.

WILDLIFE WATCHING

The wilderness nature of the park lends itself to harboring a diversity of wildlife. In early spring, look for toads and frogs crossing the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail on their way to vernal pools to mate and lay their eggs. From spring to fall, spot the occasional red-backed or spotted salamander lurking under rocks and leaf litter. The box turtle, easily camouflaged with its yellow mottled shell, looks for food on the forest floor during the summer months.

The diverse habitats of Laurel Ridge attract a variety of bird life. Year-round forest residents include chickadees, tufted titmice, pileated woodpeckers, ruffed grouse, turkeys, and great horned owls.

Turkey vultures often circle above the park in search of a meal. The flute-like call of the wood thrush is a welcome addition to any summer voyage into the woods. Spring and fall bring a variety of migratory birds through the area, including warblers and hawks.

The best way to see wildlife is to sit quietly and remain still. For the best results, use binoculars and keep a safe distance between yourself and wildlife. Do not attempt to handle any wild animal. If an animal does not run away from an approaching person, it might be sick or injured. If you observe any unusual behavior by wildlife, please contact a park employee immediately.



Ruffed grouse

LAUREL HIGHLANDS HIKING TRAIL (LHHT)



Photo by Gabriel Faria



This 70-mile hiking and backpacking trail from Ohiopyle to near Johnstown is the main attraction of Laurel Ridge State Park. The trail traverses state parks, state forests, state game lands, other public lands, and private lands. The Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail is a major segment of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, a network of trails between the mouth of the Potomac River and the Allegheny Highlands. www.nps.gov/pobe

The Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail is open year round and is blazed approximately every 100 feet with 2-inch by 5-inch yellow blazes. Connector trails lead to and from trailheads and shelter areas and are marked with blue blazes. Mileage monuments are every mile. Yellow bands around trees mark the trail at every major road crossing.



Photo by Rusty Glessner



Adirondack shelter in one of the eight overnight areas

TRAILHEADS

Six trailheads provide parking for 30 cars each and have trash receptacles.

Voluntary day use registration mailboxes are at each of the trailheads. Day hikers should fill out information cards for vital park attendance data and for use in an emergency. For overnight use of the trail, see the LHHT Overnight Information section.

SUMMARY OF TRAILHEADS AND SHELTER AREAS

There are eight overnight shelter areas; one area every six to 12 miles along the trail. Each area contains five Adirondack shelters with fireplaces, non-flush restrooms, and space for 25 tents.

Facility	Mile
Ohiopyle Trailhead	0
Ohiopyle Shelter Area	6.3
Maple Summit Road Day Parking	11.2
Rt. 653 Shelter Area	18.5
Rt. 653 Trailhead	18.8
Grindle Ridge Shelter Area	24.0
Rt. 31 Trailhead	30.6
Rt. 31 Shelter Area	32.5
Turnpike Shelter Area	38.2
Rt. 30 Trailhead	45.8
Rt. 30 Shelter Area	46.5
Rt. 271 Trailhead	56.9
Rt. 271 Shelter Area	56.9
Rt. 56 Decker Ave. Shelter Area	64.9
Rt. 56 Seward Trailhead	70.0

TRAIL RUNNING

The Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail is popular with trail runners due to the diverse terrain and unmatched beauty. Visitors run portions of the trail for a workout, or run the whole trail in one day. Some of the most challenging trail runs in the eastern United States are the Laurel Highlands Ultra races, which are held the second Saturday in June. www.laurelultra.com

SHUTTLE SERVICES

Shuttling services for hikers on the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail are available from:

- Wilderness Voyagers in Ohiopyle. 800-272-4141
- Coal Tubin' Adventures in Johnstown. 814-254-4393

Hiking Tips and Regulations

Every hiker's pace varies, but a pace of 1.5 miles per hour is average.

- Know the climate and weather conditions on the trail. In general, Laurel Ridge is cooler and receives more precipitation than the surrounding valleys. Dress appropriately.
- Be prepared and bring the proper equipment. Natural areas may possess hazards. Your personal safety and that of your family are your responsibility. Familiarize yourself with the natural hazards of the trail.
- Leave a copy of your plans with friends or relatives. Include contact phone numbers and other important information. Day hikers are encouraged to register at the trailhead kiosks for safety reasons.
- Park only in designated areas.
- Bring emergency equipment like a first aid kit, whistle, compass, and matches. Please be aware that you may be hours away from medical attention. Only call 911 in an emergency; responding emergency personnel and equipment may be at your expense.
- Stay on the trail for your safety and to protect the resource.
- Alcoholic beverages are prohibited.
- Supervise children in your care. This is particularly important when hiking.
- Wear fluorescent orange during hunting seasons when hiking in hunting areas.



- Non-potable water is available at most trailheads and shelter areas. Be prepared to treat or filter water.
- Dogs are permitted on the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail and in the shelters areas. Because uncontrolled pets may chase wildlife or frighten visitors, pets must be physically controlled, attended at all times, and on a leash. Electronic fences and leashes are prohibited.
- Camp only in designated areas and try to minimize your impact on the campsite.
- Horses, bicycles, and motorized vehicles are prohibited on the hiking trail and in the shelter areas.
- All garbage must be placed in provided refuse containers. Burying garbage is prohibited.
- Do your part to keep wildlife wild! Enjoy wildlife from a safe distance and do not feed or approach wild animals.



Overnight Information

The following regulations have been established to protect hikers and the trail:

RESERVATIONS

Reservations for overnight stays are **mandatory** and can be made up to **11 months in advance**. Reservations can be made online at www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks or by phone by calling 724-455-3744.

An **overnight camping fee is charged per night per individual in the backpacking party**. For current rates, check online at www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks.

Payment is required at the time of the reservation and may be made by credit card or Pennsylvania State Park Gift Card.

The reservation process is not complete without the issuance of a confirmation/reservation number.

BACKPACKING

Camping is **only permitted in the shelter areas and overnight stays are limited to one night at each shelter area**.

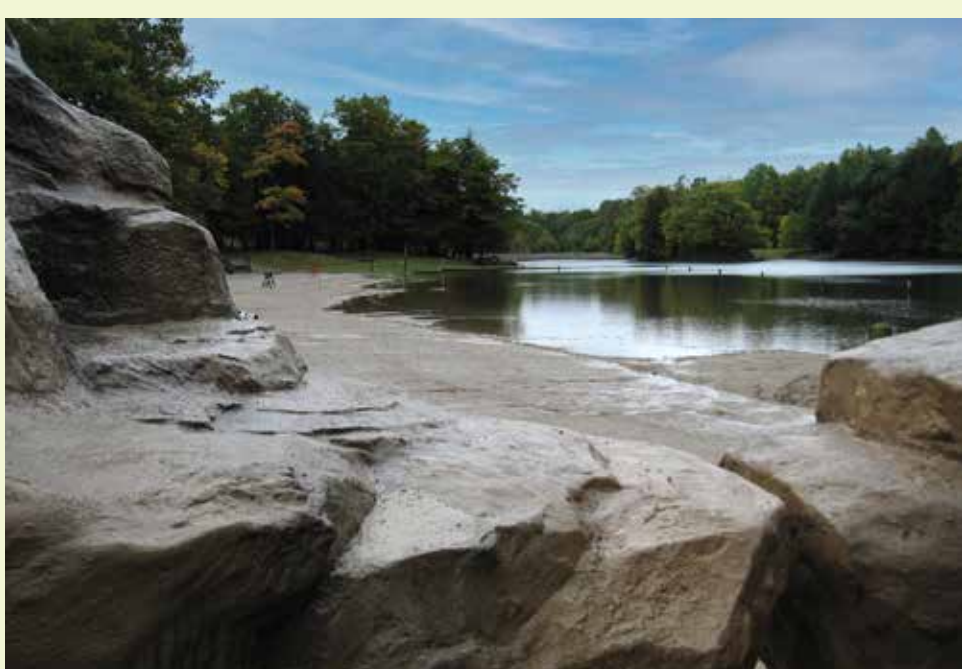
Backpacking groups are limited to the use of **three shelters and one tenting area at each overnight stop**. A shelter can accommodate up to five campers. Areas adjacent to the shelter are available for setting up campsites for additional backpacking party members.

LEAVE NO TRACE

Campers must clean and remove litter daily at toilets, parking areas, campsites, pump platforms, and surrounding areas. Dispose of dishwater in latrines and do not use sinks for personal hygiene. In no instance can dishwater be disposed of on a campsite or in an adjacent area. This causes unsanitary conditions for the camper and the next user of the site. Unsanitary conditions attract skunks, raccoons, mosquitoes, flies, and ants.

Fires are **only permitted in camp stoves, fireplaces, or park supplied fire rings**. Do not leave a fire unattended. To prevent ashes from being tracked into shelters during wet weather, leave them in the fireplaces and fire rings. Do not rake ashes onto the ground.

NEARBY STATE PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS



Kooser State Park



Laurel Hill State Park

Kooser State Park's 250 acres of forest, stream, and lake provide a beautiful backdrop for picnicking, fishing, hiking, cross-country skiing, camping, and staying in a rustic CCC cabin. 943 Glades Pike, Somerset, PA 15501. 814-445-8673. KooserSP@pa.gov

Laurel Hill State Park has an extensive trail system and provides opportunities to explore a beautiful stand of old-growth eastern hemlock and view wildlife. The park also has fishing, hunting, camping, and swimming opportunities. 1454 Laurel Hill Park Road, Somerset, PA 15501. 814-445-7725. LaurelHillSP@pa.gov

Linn Run State Park's varied topography and mixed forest make this park a scenic place for picnicking, hiking, fishing, and staying in a cabin. 770 Linn Run Road, Rector, PA 15677. 724-238-6623. LinnRunSP@pa.gov



Linn Run State Park

Laurel Mountain State Park offers a family-friendly downhill skiing and snowboarding area. The lodge offers food and beverages. For more information, contact the Laurel Mountain Ski Resort at 724-238-2801. www.laurelmountainpark.com

At an elevation of 2,739 feet, **Laurel Summit State Park** provides access to a commanding view of Laurel Ridge and the surrounding region via the Wolf Rocks Trail. Visitors also enjoy the remote feeling of the wooded picnic area with a picnic pavilion and restrooms. 724-238-6623. LinnRunSP@pa.gov



Ohiopyle State Park

Ohiopyle State Park has whitewater rafting on the Youghiogheny River and biking on the Great Allegheny Passage. The park also has opportunities for hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, and cross-country skiing. P.O. Box 105, 124 Main Street, Ohiopyle, PA 15470. 724-329-8591.

In nearby Prince Gallitzin State Forest, the **Charles F. Lewis Natural Area** features a marked trail that follows Clark Run past small waterfalls and cascades to an overlook above the Conemaugh River. P.O. Box 506, Ebensburg, PA 15931. 814-472-1862. FD06@pa.gov

Roaring Run Natural Area, in Forbes State Forest, encompasses the complete watershed of Roaring Run. Explore 3,000 acres of mountain and forested stream valley in various stages of succession. P.O. Box 519, Laughlintown, PA 15655. 724-238-1200. FD04@pa.gov

INFORMATION AND RESERVATIONS

Laurel Ridge State Park
c/o Laurel Hill State Park Complex
1454 Laurel Hill Park Road
Somerset, PA 15501
724-455-3744
LaurelRidgeSP@pa.gov

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www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks

Access for People with Disabilities

This symbol indicates facilities and activities that are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible for people with disabilities. This publication text is available in alternative formats.

In an Emergency Call 911

Responding emergency personnel and equipment may be at your expense.

Hospital directions are posted at the pavilion and at the warming hut at the PA 653 ski area. GPS coordinates are posted on bulletin boards at each trailhead.

Reservations for the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail overnight areas can be made at www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks or by calling 724-455-3744.



<https://www.cdc.gov/ticks>

Blacklegged tick (deer tick)



Actual size

